

‘History you can keep forever’

By Richard Walker, Today correspondent

KERNVILLE, Calif. – Three new books are being written about the First Peoples of the Kern River Valley.

Harold Williams, Kawaiisu, and archeologist Alan Garfinkel are completing “[Handbook of the Kawaiisu](#)” (the Kawaiisu people also refer to themselves as Nüwa.)

Williams and his family have long been involved in cultural and historical preservation. He served as chairman of the Kern Valley Indian Community and has been involved in a number of cultural site monitoring and survey projects. His sister, Janice Williams, has been instrumental in reviving Kawaiisu basketry and the Nüwa language. The Tehachapi Museum houses wrapped-coil grass baskets made by the Williamses’ grandmother, Sophie Williams.

Ethnohistorian James McClurken is authoring a history about the Kern Valley Indian Community, which includes the Kawaiisu and Paiute-Shoshone.

And Donna Miranda-Begay, chairwoman of Tubatulabals of Kern Valley, said, “We are working on expanding our written tribal history and hope to get a book published. We plan to also work more closely with several organizations within the greater Kern area that could help promote our book and Native tourism.”

McClurken is author or co-author of seven ethnohistories, among them “People of the Three Fires: The Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Ojibway of Michigan,” and “Our People, Our Journey: The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians.”

McClurken met with Kern Valley Indians and scanned photos from their personal collections on Nov. 6 at [Nuui Cunni Cultural Center](#). The next day, he attended the Kern Valley Indian Community Thanksgiving Dinner at the Lake Isabella Senior Center and talked about the project.

When published, the books are expected to be the most definitive Kern Valley Indian histories since author Bob Powers’ “Indian Country of the Tubatulabal” (1981).

Dorothy Rossback, treasurer of the Kern Valley Indian Community, said McClurken’s book will be “history you can keep forever.”

“A lot of our members don’t have photos, but we are all related and having access to each other’s family photos is a real treat. It’s been exciting for them,” she said.

Some of the photographs date to the 1800s. Among the photos Rossback contributed is an image of her great-great-grandmother as a young woman.

Proceeds from book sales will help defray the costs of Kern Valley Indian Community's federal recognition efforts, Rossback said.

The U.S. signed treaties with ancestors of the valley's First People in the 1850s, but those treaties were never ratified by Congress. Many descendants later moved to land allotments and two groups – the Kern Valley Indian Community and Tubatulabals of Kern Valley – are working to finalize the government-to-government relationship with the U.S. that was set in motion when the treaties were signed.

The Kern Valley Indian Community, or KVIC, is one of four agencies providing services to the Native community of the valley. KVIC has hosted cultural, community and educational events. The Kern River Paiute Council manages the Nuui Cunni Cultural Center in Lake Isabella.

Tubatulabals of Kern Valley has a tribal government office in nearby Mountain Mesa, operates a language school, and has contracted with IHS and other agencies for housing, road and water improvements. A Tribal TANF office provides various services to the local Native community.

Donna Miranda-Begay, chairwoman of Tubatulabals of Kern Valley, is serving on the California Department of Water Resources Tribal Communications Committee.

DWR hosted the Tribal Water Summit Nov. 4 – 5 in Sacramento, to give California's First Peoples a voice in the state's 2010 Water Plan. "A desired outcome is a 'roadmap' with strategies for preserving Native water rights and providing for the sustainable management of California's sacred waters," DWR reported on its Web site.

Summit sponsors were DWR, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, Pala Band of Mission Indians, Lone Band of Miwok Indians, Redding Rancheria, Sempra Energy Utilities, Seventh Generation Fund, **Sierra Nevada Conservancy**, Tubatulabals of Kern Valley, and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

June Price is acting chairwoman of the Kern Valley Indian Community. She succeeds Harold Williams, who resigned for health reasons.